

## Pedestrian Safety

20 January 2010

In December 2009, I was on temporary duty in Jacksonville, Florida when I had an experience that made me realize the importance of pedestrian safety awareness. It was on the day before I was scheduled to leave Jacksonville, I had just refueled my government vehicle at Naval Air Station Jacksonville and within five minutes of leaving the base, I became caught up in bumper to bumper traffic. I remember thinking to myself, *I bet there was a fender-bender ahead and now I'm stuck in this traffic*, the longer traffic was moving at a snail's pace the more annoyed I became. I again thought to myself, *It was probably someone texting or talking on a cell phone, or someone not paying attention to what they were doing, and here I am being inconvenienced*. After approximately thirty minutes, the line of traffic snaked through the parking lot of a mall; at that point I stopped at a red light when I noticed to my right a man was sitting on the ground with his back against the front tire of a police car with his head in his hands. I was puzzled for a moment until I looked ahead and saw an abandoned car stopped in the left lane of traffic and a white sheet covering someone's body underneath the car. I thought to myself the body under that sheet is too small to be an adult; then it hit me, it was a child!

I immediately felt foolish that after 23 years of working as a safety professional I had dismissed the fact that this accident could have resulted in a fatality. The next evening when I arrived back home in Tennessee, I went on the internet and I discovered the little body under that sheet was that of a six year old girl.

I thought to myself how I would have felt if one of my two children had been killed in such a tragic and senseless accident. I felt sorry for the child's mother because I knew she was experiencing the pain only a parent who had lost a child could know.

The little girl, her five year old brother, and her mother were walking home after Christmas shopping. The family had to cross a six lane major thoroughfare; they did cross at a crosswalk, but the mother had never crossed at this particular intersection before. The five year old boy was in a stroller and the mother had made sure the little girl's hand was on the stroller which she covered with her own hand.

The family proceeded to cross the intersection once the traffic light turned red, stopping all six lanes of traffic. They had only passed the second lane of traffic when the traffic light turned green. The mother reported: *“she heard a car rev its engine, and seconds later her little girl was lying on the street”*. As a result of the accident the five year old boy was uninjured; the mother suffered broken ribs and a broken leg, and the six year old girl lay dead. A background check of the driver revealed a history of traffic violations. Those violations included multiple tickets for speeding, running stop signs and driving with an expired license or registration.

One factor regarding this accident was the mother failed to press the pedestrian walk button which would have caused the red light stopping traffic to remain red for forty-five seconds; without pressing the button, the red light changes quickly. Unfortunately the driver’s statement has not been published so I do not know what his explanation was; but the fact remains the driver had a responsibility to operate his vehicle in a safe and alert manner. In any case, 6 days before Christmas 2009, a little, innocent six year old girl lost her precious life as the result of this terrible pedestrian accident.

### **Pedestrian Safety Tips**

- ✓ Always walk on the sidewalk. If there is no sidewalk and you must walk in the roadway, always walk facing traffic.
- ✓ Dress to be seen. Wearing bright/light colored clothing helps drivers see you. Reflective clothing is the best.
- ✓ Cross streets only at marked crosswalks or intersections.
- ✓ If crossing a multiple lane roadway, pedestrians should visually clear each lane as they proceed.
- ✓ If a car is parked where you are trying to cross, look for a driver who may pull out and not see you as he is looking for traffic.
- ✓ Remember telephone poles, utility boxes and parked vehicles block on-coming driver’s ability to see you.
- ✓ Look LEFT – RIGHT – LEFT prior to entering the street.
- ✓ Give drivers ample time to stop prior to entering the crosswalk.
- ✓ Crossing at locations that have traffic signals helps motorist see you.

- ✓ Remove your headphones while crossing the street, so you can hear approaching traffic.
- ✓ Always hold a child by the hand while crossing the street and remember, WALK don't run.
- ✓ If the intersection has a pedestrian walk button - press it and cross when you are cleared to cross.

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